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Lasting Lyrics

By

Lynchburgers

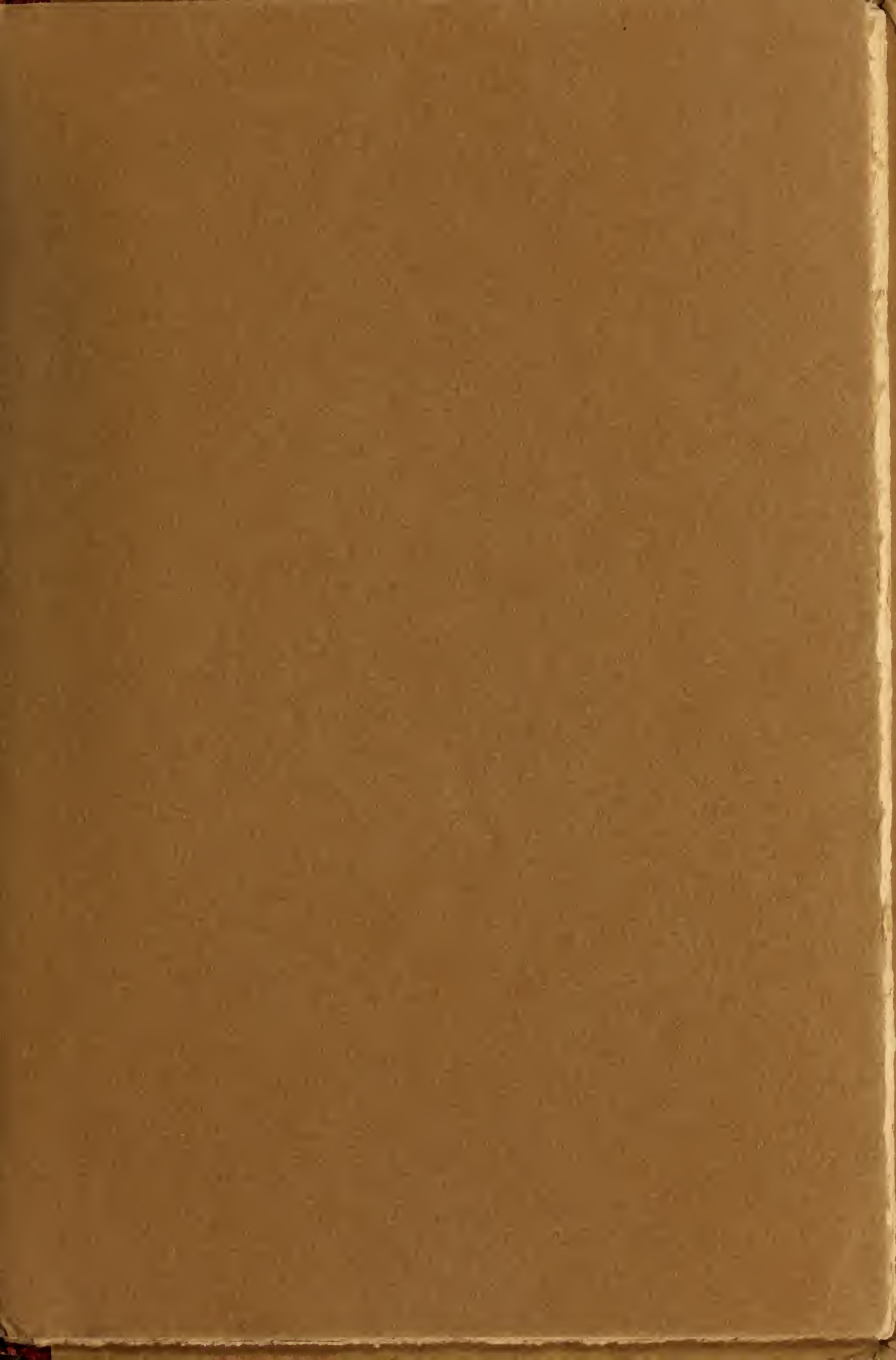




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LASTING LYRICS

by

LYNCHBURGERS



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Collected and Published by

THE LIONS CLUB
OF LYNCHBURG

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Foreword

The Committee of the Lions Club of Lynchburg, charged with editing this little volume, has found the task of selecting its contents rather an easy one. Indeed, the selecting has not been done by them. Every poem included has been reprinted in places remote from its origin, approved by critics unbiased by local claims, and applauded by audiences far from its native city. Bransford Vawter's poem has even made its way into other lands and languages and has been enriched by an excellent musical setting. And so, the committee has simply registered the verdict of this wider, and perhaps wiser, jury.

These poems, also, have overcome the annihilating effect of time, and, in spite of their age, they still evidence the perpetual vitality of youth.

They are submitted, therefore, in confidence that they will be found worthy of the title of Lasting Lyrics.

T. J. INGRAM, JR.
W. M. BLACK,
FRED M. DAVIS,
Committee.

Lasting Lyrics by Lynchburgers

BRANSFORD VAWTER. 1815-1838

Vawter was Lynchburg's "earliest poet." He was born in a little frame house which occupied the position of the present Law Building, and was the second son of Benjamin Vawter, tailor.

Bransford early evinced a love for literature, and especially for poetry. When four years old his father would bring him into his shop and make him recite Goldsmith's "Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog," which was his favorite selection. Bransford failed in his apprenticeship as a tailor. He later attended private school, and, after two years of progress, left and became deputy clerk under General D. Rodes.

Vawter is described as having a frail, graceful figure, with a clear-cut, intellectual face, dark brilliant eyes, and a genial expression. He was handicaped by dissipation and ill health; nevertheless, he was a very popular man. He was an officer in the Lynchburg "Invincibles," and president of the Patrick Henry Debating Society.

Few of his compositions have been preserved. The poem published in this collection first appeared anonymously in the *Southern Literary Messenger*. It was copied by other magazines, set to music and sung throughout the United States, and was even translated into several other languages. The inspiration for the poem was probably supplied by circumstances in the actual experience of the poet.

Vawter died at the early age of twenty-three, and occupies an unmarked grave in Lynchburg about one hundred yards from the entrance of the Methodist Cemetery.

L a s t i n g L y r i c s b y L y n c h b u r g e r s

I'D OFFER THEE THIS HAND OF MINE

I'd offer thee this hand of mine,
If I could love thee less.
But heart so warm, so fond as thine,
Should never know distress.
My fortune is too hard for thee,
'Twould chill my dearest joy;
I'd rather weep to see thee free
Than win thee to destroy.

I leave thee in thy happiness,
As one too dear to love—
As one I think of but to bless,
As wretchedly I rove.
And, oh, when sorrow's cup I drink
All bitter though it be,
How sweet 'twill be for me to think,
It holds no drop for thee.

And now my dreams are sadly o'er,
Fate bids them all depart,
And I must leave my native shore,
In brokenness of heart.
And, oh, dear one! when far from thee,
I ne'er know joy again,
I would not that one thought of me,
Should give thy bosom pain.

Lynchburg, Va., 1826.

BRANSFORD VAWTER.

L a s t i n g L y r i c s b y L y n c h b u r g e r s

HENRY GREY LATHAM, M.D. 1832-1903

Henry Grey Latham was born March 4, 1832, the second son of Dr. Henry Latham and Rebecca Owen Latham. He received his early education in the private schools of Lynchburg, later attending the University of Virginia, where he took his degree in medicine.

As a young man Latham was a member of the engineering corps that surveyed the present route of the Norfolk and Western Railway from Lynchburg to Salem, Virginia. John Brown's raid found him engaged in the practise of medicine in his native city. He responded very promptly to the call of war by organizing on his own initiative an artillery company known as "Latham's Battery," which took a prominent part in active service, particularly in the first battle of Manassas. Although slated for a promotion, Latham was transferred to the medical corps as a surgeon with the rank of major.

From his war career to his death, May 5, 1903, Dr. Latham lived in Lynchburg and devoted his energies to the practise of his profession. For several terms he was president of the Medical Society of Virginia.

An engaging wit and humor, a good baritone voice and a genial disposition, were among those traits of character and accomplishments remembered by those privileged to know him.

MY CASTLE IN THE AIR

Tho' fields are ripe for harvest, and burdened branch and vine
Yield up their dainty treasures to other hands than mine;
Tho' white-clad ships come dancing, wealth-laden o'er the main,
While mine went out hope-freighted but came not back again,
Tho' friends who should be loving, deceive me or grow cold,
And some who should be mindful, forget the poor and old,
The skies are always cloudless—the days are ever fair
In Aiden where I've builded—My Castle in the Air.

The sunshine and the flowers, the shade in mossy dells,
The lowing of the cattle, and the tinkling of the bells,
The "swish" of circling sickle, in the golden-headed grain,
The murmur of the brooklet, the "harvest home" refrain,
The whistle of the partridge, the droning of the bees,
The confidential whisp'ring of the leaves upon the trees,
The joyous laugh of children, one face surpassing fair,
All came to me in Aiden—at My Castle in the Air.

Beloved and grand old castle! God's blessing on the hours
I've passed in peaceful rapture, beneath thy sun-bathed towers
Where fruit turned not to ashes—nor what I touched to dust;
Where hope attained fruition, and love was met by trust;
Where envy never entered and falsehood never trod
And doubt and hate were withered by faith in man and God,
What "Kismet" is to Mussulman, what, to the Christian, prayer
Is the refuge in my reverie—in My Castle in the Air.

DR. H. GREY LATHAM.

Lasting Lyrics by Lynchburgers

H. C. FEATHERSTON

Howell Colston Featherston, son of Captain John C. Featherston, and Lititia Preston (Floyd) Featherston, was born in Campbell County, near Lynchburg, Virginia, on April 27, 1871. He was educated in the public schools of Lynchburg and Campbell County, later attending the New London Academy and the University of Virginia.

Mr. Featherston grew up under strong Confederate influences, his father and five uncles having served in the Confederate Army. He is the author of a number of poems which have been published and wrote the first magazine article which ever appeared on the subject of lynch law, taking the view, now generally conceded, that lynch law originated in the irregular and unauthorized "court" of Colonel Charles Lynch, a revolutionary patriot of Campbell County.

Mr. Featherston began the practice of law in 1893 in Lynchburg, where he is still engaged in his profession.

L a s t i n g L y r i c s b y L y n c h b u r g e r s

THAT LITTLE NIGGER BOY I USED TO OWN

I have met a heap of people, and I've had a heap o' chums—
Good fellows, just as good as ever known!
But I've never seen a better, nor a truer, kinder friend
Than that little nigger boy I used to own.

His hide was black as charcoal, and his heart was just as warm;
He wasn't a great philosopher, but never thought no harm;
And tho' to flatter childhood mankind is awful prone,
'Twas a cunning little devil that I used to boss and own.

There were lots of pickaninnies 'round my old plantation home,
But Alec he belonged to me alone.
He could outrun all the others, and he'd fight an' lie for me,
And I loved that nigger boy I used to own.

His head was round and nappy and his eyes were big and white;
His mouth was quite capacious, and it let in lots of light;
But, tho' he wa'n't a beauty, nor a plate for style an' tone,
The love was true and honest of that boy I used to own.

We were playmates all together, tho' I was kind of king.
But I never put myself up on a throne;
And I told tales in the hoghouse and I waded in the branch,
With that little nigger boy I used to own.

It's true we'd get to fightin', and I'd lick 'em if I could;
But this was rather seldom, for they generally were good;
And I'd swap 'em off my dinner for an ashcake and a bone,
And I'd take my midday repast with that boy I used to own.

Lasting Lyrics by Lynchburgers

And then I grew up bigger and I used to ride to school,
Through meadows where the rice and cane were sown;
And he'd take my horse at even, and he'd love to see me come,
That happy, smilin' boy I used to own.

He would steal watermelons, but no one didn't mind;
They knew he couldn't help it; 'twas the nature of his kind;
And when in gaudy brilliance the autumn full moon shone,
I'd hunt the cunning 'possum, with that boy I used to own.

But my schoolin' wasn't finished, for before I was sixteen,
The trumpet call to war was loudly blown;
And I volunteered my service and I hastened to the front,
And was followed by that boy I used to own.

He would get scared in battle, and, dam' 'im, how he'd run!
But he'd always find the comp'ny when the soldiers' work was
done;
An' he'd steal good rations for me, tho' from whence I've never
known,
And I've oft been saved my supper by that boy I used to own.

The war was long and bitter but his ardor never flagged;
He kept the oath to follow me he'd sworn;
An' when it was all over I brought him home again,
That shiny, grinnin' boy I used to own.

He would lie 'bout the battles, an' he swo' he'd fought 'em all;
He said he'd killed some sixteen men, he knew, he'd seen 'em fall;
But he took a fatal fever, which no skill could check nor tone,
And I nursed him like a brother then, that boy I used to own.

Lasting Lyrics by Lynchburgers

But soon it was all over, and we laid him in his grave,
No truer friend I've ever had to mourn;
And I raised a granite monument to mark the place we laid
That loving, faithful boy I used to own.

He had his small shortcomings, and they may be counted sin;
But Saint Peter knows a nigger, and he'll make excuse for him!
And if, in God's great goodness, I shall view sweet Heaven's throne
I know I'll see that smilin' face, that boy I used to own.

I have met a heap o' people, and I've had a heap o' chums—
 Good fellows, just as good as ever known!
 But I've never seen a better, nor a truer, kinder friend
 Than that little nigger boy I used to own.

His hide was black as charcoal, and his heart was just as warm;
He wa'n't a great philosopher, but never thought no harm;
And tho' to flatter childhood mankind is awful prone,
I love the recollections of that boy I used to own.

Lynchburg, Va., December 10, 1899. HOWELL C. FEATHERSTON.

Lasting Lyrics by Lynchburgers

EDWARD SANFORD GREGORY. 1843-1884

Edward Sanford Gregory was born in Lynchburg, Virginia, August 19, 1843.

He was a student in Lynchburg College—a Methodist Protestant institution, occupying the square bounded by Floyd, Wise, Tenth, and Eleventh Streets—when the Civil War began, and he at once entered the Southern Army. He was a soldier in Vicksburg, Mississippi, during its siege and was included in the army surrendered by General Pemberton. After several months as a prisoner of war he was exchanged and continued in actual service until the close of hostilities.

At the close of the war he began work as a public school teacher, with newspaper work as a side line, but soon abandoned the former, and devoted himself to a journalistic career. In rapid succession he served on the following papers: *The Lynchburg Virginian*, *The Lynchburg Republican*, *The Richmond Enquirer*, *The Petersburg Index*, *The Petersburg Index-Appeal*. In all his years as a journalist and editor his work and influence extended far beyond the limits of the town in which he lived. He was a brilliant contributor to papers in New York and Philadelphia and had stories and essays published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *the Southern Literary Messenger*, and other periodicals.

During these years, also from 1866 to 1879 he had quietly and thoughtfully prepared himself for the ministry, and on January 27, 1879, he was ordained as deacon in the Protestant Episcopal Church. He became Rector of Old Fork and Trinity Churches in Hanover County, but in 1880 was called to Lynchburg as Rector of Epiphany Chapel on what is now McKinley Avenue. To this ministry he devoted his energies and his talents until his death December 19, 1884.

Two volumes of his poems have been published: "Bonniebell" and "Lenore and Other Poems."



CROSS AND CROWN

I.

Under the axe and under the halter
There are spirits which neither shrink nor falter,
Which neither dread the seeming shame,
Nor dungeon damp nor wreathing flame,
But die with courage and in calm,
Secure of triumph song and psalm,
And the martyr's wreath of palm.
Witnesses to truth sublime,
Their voices ring to latest time,
Their dying words outlast the breath,
And spring like flow'rs from mouldering death.
Fast they stood for Truth in pain,
And firm they fac'd the iron rain,
Nor reck'd its roar and rattle,
But died as brave men love to die,
With the flag of their faith unfurl'd on high,
In the perilous edge of battle!

II.

Other battles are lost and won,
Other gallant deeds are done.
Many are they who laugh and smile,
With a weary heart the while,
And bear with patient faith and hope
Their burdens up the rocky slope,
And hush sad fears that cloud the mind.
Nor look at darkening gulfs behind,
Nor heed the chill of falling night,
Nor yet the poisonous vapor's blight,
Nor any threat of sound or sight.

L a s t i n g L y r i c s b y L y n c h b u r g e r s

Theirs the task to work and wait,
Without favor, thanks or state;
Theirs the heaviest doom to share—
The pleas'd and patient face to wear,
And yet the hungering heart to bear;
To spend their all for love's dear sake,
Yet never answering echo wake;
Theirs the dreary fate to pray
For dear hearts drifting fast away
From home's safe nest and duty's day,
Yet see the vain petition die,
As if it storm'd an iron sky.
Theirs too to front misfortune's stroke,
And wear privation's galling yoke,
And feel, with faltering heart forlorn,
The sting of treason and of scorn.
These are the battles won at home,
Which shine not in Valhalla's dome,
Nor sound in epic strains of Rome;
And these are fought by nameless men
And nameless women, whom the pen
Leaves nameless to historic ken.

III.

Stars, eagles, plumes, the accolade,
For conquering heroes wait,
Who win, with wasting brand and blade,
The title to be great.
These, home from havoc, proudly share
The smiles and favors of the fair,
And all their country's praise and prayer.

L a s t i n g L y r i c s b y L y n c h b u r g e r s

Theirs are the highest seats of state,
And honor's rich, descending scroll,
And glory's notes, resounding late
In echoes of the soul!
What glory shall be *thine*, O heart,
Whose fields were won, alone, apart—
Whose steadfast strength and fiery will
Were spent in conflicts lone and still?
What shalt thou have, whose breast was bare
The wounds of other breasts to spare,
And who, when stricken, made no moan,
But stood still battling and alone?
What decoration shall be hung
By royal hands, with honey'd tongue,
Above the bleeding breast obscure
Which fell but fail'd not to endure?

*Thine, faithful heart, are stars of Heaven;
To thee are noblest titles given,
And when the roll of fame is made
Of those who duty's heights have trod,
Upon thee shall the accolade
Be lower'd by the sword of God!*

L a s t i n g L y r i c s b y L y n c h b u r g e r s

MRS. CORNELIA J. M. JORDAN. 1830-1898

Mrs. Cornelia J. M. Jordan was born in the city of Lynchburg, January 11, 1830, and spent most of her life here, passing away a few days after her sixty-eighth birthday. She was buried in the Presbyterian Cemetery.

Mrs. Jordan is considered to be one of the major female poets of Virginia. Two books of poems—"Echoes from the Cannon" and "Flowers of Hope and Memory"—bear witness to her poetic skill. She loved to depict the scenes and experiences of ordinary life,—religion, death, flowers, the changing seasons, and friendship.

NOT AGAIN

Not again, lady fair;
Never, ah! never;
Thou who didst sport the chain,
Rent it forever.

Gone is the spirit's trust,
Gone, and forever;
Thou canst not call it back,
Charming deceiver.

Once it were pain to part—
Then I believed thee;
Now I can bear the smart—
Thou hast deceived me.

CORNELIA J. M. JORDAN.

LITTLE THINGS

Little things—aye, little things,
 Make up the sum of life—
A word, a look, a single tone,
 May lead to calm or strife.

A word may part the dearest friends—
 One, little, unkind word,
Which in some light, unguarded hour
 The heart with anger stirred.

A look will sometimes send a pang
 Of anguish to the heart;
A tone will often cause the tear
 In sorrow's eye to start.

One little act of kindness done—
 One little soft word spoken,
Hath power to wake a thrill of joy,
 E'en in a heart that's broken.

Then let us watch these *little things*,
 And so respect each other,
That not a word, or look, or tone,
 May wound or vex a brother.

CORNELIA J. M. JORDAN.

Lasting Lyrics by Lynchburgers

WILLIAM WAUGH SMITH, A.B., A.M., LLD. 1845-1912

William Waugh Smith was born in Warrenton, Virginia, March 12, 1845. He was educated in the Warrenton Academy, conducted by his father, and at a school in Alexandria, Virginia, until the outbreak of the Civil War.

At sixteen he volunteered in the Southern Army and saw active service for four years. He was wounded at Seven Pines, and again at Gettysburg, so seriously that his name was published in the list of those killed. In the "Wilderness" he was struck by a rifle ball which proved harmless as it buried itself in a book he was carrying in his pocket.

At the conclusion of the war, after he had completed his studies at Randolph-Macon College and at the University of Virginia, he entered the career of educator, to which he gave the entire strength of his heart, his mind, and his body. In 1871 he was associate principal of Bethel Academy, in 1878 professor in Randolph-Macon College, in 1886 president of this institution, in 1893 he established Randolph-Macon Woman's College at Lynchburg of which he was president, and in 1897 he was made Chancellor of the Randolph-Macon system, including the two colleges and three preparatory schools.

Dr. Smith died at his home at Randolph-Macon Woman's College, November 29, 1912. "A fearless soldier, a great educator, a high-minded citizen, a leader of men."

MY GIRLS AND I

We are good friends, we are,
My girls and I;
Such friends, with mickle care
The days go by.
The nod, the smile, the beck, the call,
The music-making laughter, all
Brighten each corridor and hall.
Girls are so spry!

We know each other well,
My girls and I;
This man—too old to tell—
These maids so spry.
Oft when in judgment I must say
“’Twas naughty” of some thoughtless way,
I smile to think, in younger day
Just so did I.

We often disagree,
My girls and I;
How could it otherwise be
With girls so spry?
And then I scold and preach, and they
Just pout a while and say, “nay, nay,”
And then are good that livelong day,
Those girls so spry.

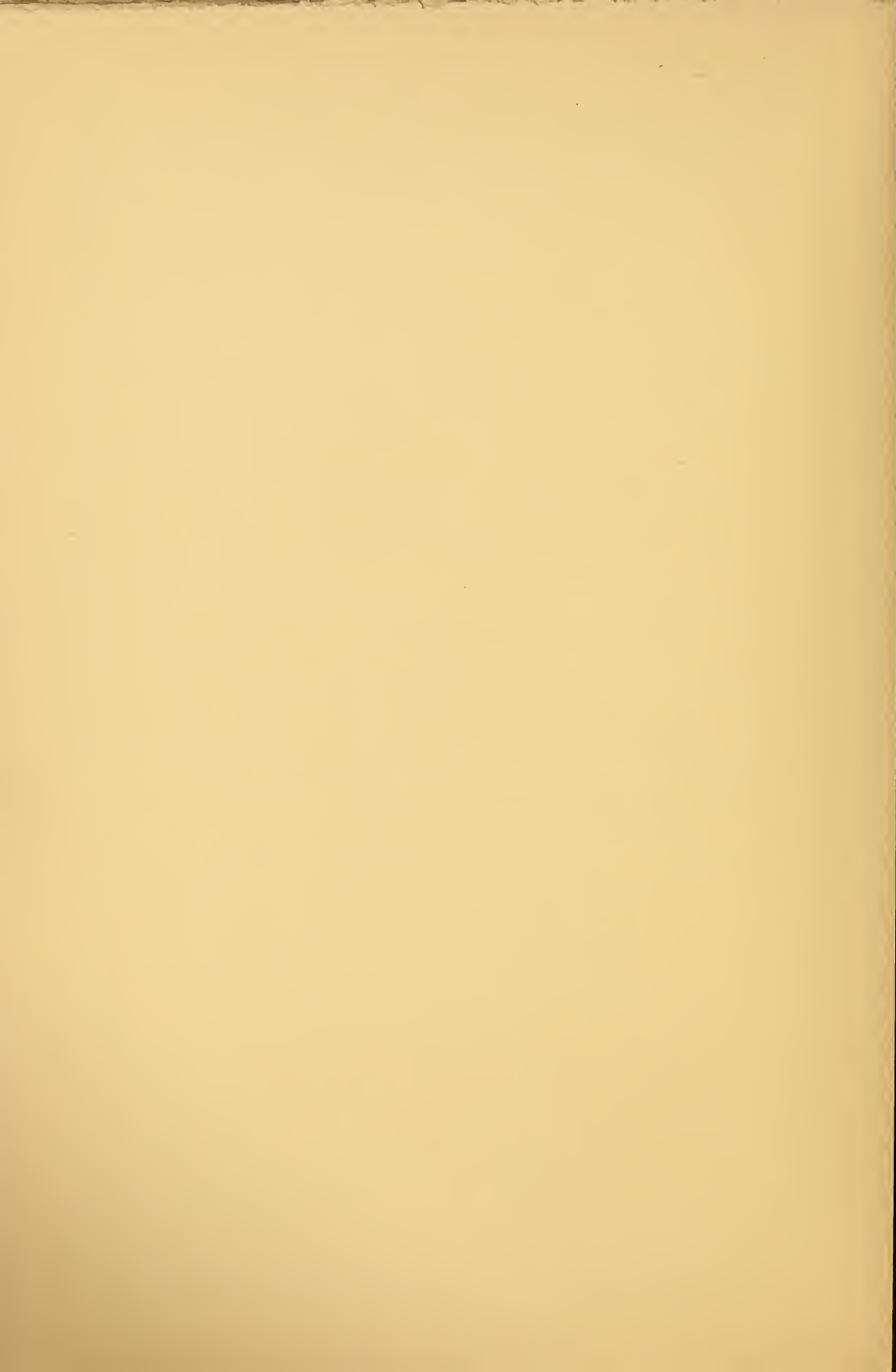
L a s t i n g L y r i c s b y L y n c h b u r g e r s

We love alike, we do,
My girls and I;
For they to right are true,
Although so spry.
And should some real grief distress
Or burdening sorrow heavier press,
How quick with helpful tenderness,
My girls are nigh!

.

I can but think that we,
My girls and I,
Shall meet beyond the sea
That bounds life's sky.
For if I reckon not amiss,
Pure love is treasure, e'en in bliss,
And garnered in that home from this,
Shall never die.

DR. W. W. SMITH.







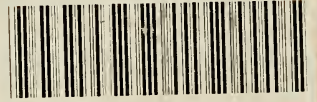
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